

FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF

Directed by John Hughes
Produced by John Hughes and Tom Jacobson
Distributed by Paramount Pictures
Released in 1986

The joys of high school are fleeting, and more fondly remembered by those who find little but disappointment thereafter. Sometimes one day can leave a defining impression. Good movies work the same magic. This one mixes the high and low with exhilarating adroitness. Amidst the hijinks and cons, gullible parents and guffaws, in the contrast of stifling suburban calm with urban discovery, Ferris saves his best friend. After a day of impetuous adventure, the best of his life, Cameron is finally empowered. The joys of high school are fleeting, but Cameron learns; he will not lament the passing of those days. In his friendship with Ferris Bueller he has found the inspiration for a life worth living.

"Cameron, this is my ninth sick day. If I get caught I won't graduate. I'm not doing this for me, I'm doing it for you."

Ferris, in one of his inspired asides, observes that school will be finished in a couple of months. There will be the summer, with he and Cameron preoccupied in labor, and then they're off to different schools. That will be the end of it. Best friends since the fifth grade, Ferris knows this may well be his last chance to help his friend deal with anxieties engendered by a troubled family rent by discord. Cameron is the only child. His parents hate each other. His mother seems to stay away a lot. His father lavishes affection on a vintage Ferrari. To facilitate the rescue of his girlfriend from school, Ferris prevails on Cameron to allow the Ferrari out of the garage. The whole day through the car is a source of worry for Cameron. It is a symbol of his father's exacting strictness and cold personality. Cameron fears his wrath should anything go wrong. Mr. Frye devotes energies to the restoration and maintenance of the roadster that should rightfully be directed towards his son. Cameron's rage for being so demeaned soon outstrips his fear of discipline. He is on the cusp of manhood. Ferris knows his friend must change now, and by helping himself to the Ferrari he may be hoping to provoke the definitive confrontation between father and son.

Their perpetual conflict will reach its climax because Cameron first dents the front end of the car, and then accidentally (subconsciously?) sends it hurtling to destruction. Ferris offers to take all the blame but, significantly, Cameron accepts the burden of the situation. He even welcomes it—heretofore lamenting that Ferris can handle anything while he finds himself outmatched in all conditions, he has seen in his best friend's example a model for his own rehabilitation.

Cameron spoke of his catatonic reflections just before destroying the Ferrari. He said that as the shock of the car's mileage wore off, he realized that he couldn't keep living his life like he had been doing—taking everything seriously, allowing his depressions to reduce his body to recurring illnesses. His father had done him wrong, but he could not allow his old man to ruin his life.

What is not clear is whether he arrives at that point of resolution before or after he drops into the pool. Ferris rescues him and it may be that Cameron really was making an attempt at suicide, only to laugh it off as a joke—after Ferris pulls him out. Even if it all was in jest, it is symbolic of the true rescue Ferris has undertaken on this brightest of days.

Even bringing Sloane along helps Cameron. One of the more poignant moments in the film comes as Ferris has joined the Von Steuben Day Parade, lip synching "Danka Shoen," dedicating it to "a young man who doesn't think he's seen anything good today." Awed by his indefatigable chutzpah, Cameron contrasts Ferris's worry-free living with his own dour defeatism, and finds a willing ear in Ferris's girlfriend. Ferris shares with the audience the fact that Cameron hasn't dated, and he fears the first woman Cameron sleeps with will become his wife. He will be grateful to find the love denied him growing up, so grateful he will be weak, and his wife will despise him, and another generation will be ruined. Cameron and Sloane seem well matched for each other, but because she is dating Ferris, they have a safe platonism going, which allows Cameron to vent his feelings and get the female perspective on things without getting himself in trouble.

The one moment where Cameron really goes deep, deeper than his catatonic meditations, is in the art museum, as he stares at the indistinct face of a child in Georges Seurat's famous "A Sunday on the Grande Jatte," that masterpiece of pointillism. The girl's face is expressionless, staring out as Cameron stares in, equally expressionless. But as we jump cut closer and closer to her, her countenance grows sinister, like a quiet scream fighting to be heard. We don't know what Cameron takes from the experience, but the symbolism is apparent. Such is the power of art, to transport and provoke. Movies have that same power, but many times over.

There is a lot more to *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. It is full of delightful surprises, exuberant in creativity, at times celebratory. It sports real tension (with a solid and well-developed climax) and strong recurring jokes ("Save Ferris"). It is a witty fun-fest with a point to make. The characterizations are excellent, with Mr. Rooney and Jeanie making waves in their own subplots. It is deftly edited, packing lots of story development and a multitude of scenes into short screen time. And it is exactly scored by Ira Newborn, who eclectically mixes genres and textures, makes way for the appropriate pop song here and there, and even has off-screen voices singing in commentary—the Cameron in Egypt and Shauna ditties.

It's a wonderful film, breezy and fun. But the movie is enjoyable because the characters are invested with real feelings, hurts and concerns. We know their personalities, and by the end of the film we are rooting for them. And Ferris's relationship with best friend Cameron is at the very center of the story. Without Cameron's redemption, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* would only glorify indolence and irresponsibility. Because Ferris set out to have fun *and* save his friend, a great day becomes a *good* day.